ECHOES OF THE ANCIENT SUN GOD OF SCANDINAVIA

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Our knowledge of the Scandinavian Sun god of the Bronze Age is much limited. What we know is only distant echoes from the past, which was fogged and distant already in late pagan times, where the earlier Sun god had been transformed and recreated into something very different. By searching in what appears at first to be opposites, we could find signs of this transformation and what was before.

A name that provides an echo in this context is ‘Ull’ (Ullr). The origin and age of the name is uncertain, but most suggest that Ull was the name of the Bronze Age Sun god in the Swedish and East Norwegian areas. Ull is the deity of bonds and union, whose symbol is the ring. This ring of “oaths taken” is reflected in the large disc that we could see in the ocean of the heavens. The name ‘Ring’ (Hringir) can also be synonymous with Ull and are aimed precisely at the god's symbolic properties. Ull as the sky god is connected to the earth goddess Njärd (Nerthus). The Sun god unites with the earth goddess every midsummer, when the rays of him shines the longest, and when the great disc reaches its climax and perfection.

One name connected to Ull, is that in Norway prominent ‘Hano’ or ‘Häner’. Another name associated with the Sun god is ‘Meile’ "mile stepper", which is also a first name for Hano, whose step measures the firmament with three steps, from the east to the zenith, from the zenith to the west and then back west to east going under the earth. The deities Hano and Ull represent different geographical and tribal distinctions and are both the reflections of this more ancient Sun god, where Hano is a western form and Ull an Eastern form. They both represent deities, however, derived from an elderly religious community.

The Norse name Ullr and the Germanic ‘Wulþuz’ appears as the deities or epithets in elder Germanic paganism. It refers to the characteristics of deity and means "shine", "glory" or "solar radiance". Wulþuz in Codex argenteus means "majestic splendor".
During the late pagan period, Ull is transformed from its

original form to something of its opposite, but still visible in the hidden signals of the original meaning of Ull as a solar deity. Saxo's description establishes Ull (or Ollerus as he is called in Latinized form) as a crafty magician with the ability to travel by magical means. Saxo tells about how he had a special bone, which was marked with curses, which he could use to travel over water, instead of using a boat. Furthermore, Saxo tells that when Odin went into exile, Ull took his place and ruled during Odin's name for ten years, until Odin returned and Ull fled to Svitjod (Sweden). Ull is further said to have been killed by the Danes. Saxo's description can partly be interpreted as myth of seasonal change, but also as a reflection of cultic contradictions and the fall of the cult of Ull. The story of how the Danes slay Ull, shows how the Swedish influence in Southwest Scandinavia falls under the pressure of the Danes and thus reflects a shift in the structure of power of the ancient Nordic region.

In Grímnismál the habitation of Ull is called ‘Ýdalir’, meaning "Yew Valley". The yew used to make bows and the word ‘ýr’ meaning "yew" is often used synonymously with the bow. The significance of the yew tree is also another, as associated with high sacred tree. The tree that is described as the "forever green" at Old Uppsala, which by description could have been a huge yew tree. The yew is also associated with death and the sacred tree could be seen as a sacrificial tree.

Ull is mentioned in Grímnismál in verse 42:
Ullar hylli hefr
ok allra goða
hverr er tekr fyrstr á funa;
þvíat opnir heimar
verða um ása sonum,
þá er hefia af hvera.

Ullr’s and all the gods’
favour shall have,
whoever first shall look to the fire;
for open will the dwelling be,
to the Æsir´s sons,
when the kettles are lifted off

Whoever gives Odin the heavens free, the Sun god could look at him and become his friend. It aims to the covenant between heaven and earth, and of the importance of the sacred king. It is clear that Ull held a special position when the lines speak of Ull as a separate deity in relation to other gods. It is also conceivable that there is therefore a contradiction between the holy place of Ull (vi), Ullevi, and

all the holy place of the other gods, Alguvi. Other relations with the gods in late pagan sources suggest Ull's importance as a Sun god. In Gylfaginning in the Prose Edda, tells of Ull as the first among archers and skiers. He is beautiful to look at and has the characteristics of a young warrior. It is also described as good to call him in single combat. The English word "fair" means initially "blonde" and associated to the Sun. Another connection to the golden features and the blond hair is the description that Ull is the son of Sun lady Sif, the goddess with the golden hair and from a marriage with the elder sky god. Viktor Rydberg emphasizes the meaning of Ydalirs as the place of the "bow" or "arches valleys". He also maintains a mythological connection between Ull, and who Rydberg emphasizes to be his father, Övrandel (Överandel-Egil) and grandfather, Geirvandel. Ull is further said to have continued in his father's footsteps as an archer.

In Gylfaginning, Ull is associated with archery and skiing. In relation to Saxo's description of Ull’s matters of transport, which was rather a magic bone, it is primarily the function as a runner over both land and water that is the common denominator. A shield was once called "Ull’s ship", which probably refers to Ull the skier, but may also relate to Ull’s ship called Skjoldr in the Laufás-Edda. The ancient importance of Ull's ship and shield is likely the means to travel across the sky in a ship carrying a shield (the sun). In Beowulf, Scyld is mentioned and is the origin of the ancient Danish Skjöldunga-dynasty, where their ancestor was said to travel on a ship with a gold shield, which at his death was returned back to the sea. The patriarch of the dynasty appears in the story as an original sacred king connected to the Sun god's characteristics. Ull is also highlighted as a good rider and thus are linked to the Sun horse riding across the sky.

Ull's weapon is the bow and he has the sunbeam as his arrow. The Sun god is the hunter of heavens. Likewise, Apollo, with his solar aspects is also an archer god, similarly as Rudra and Shiva. The opposites often seem to emphasize the parallels. Shiva is a hunter, while Apollo is linked with the shepherd. The late pagan connection of Ull as skiers and winter god consolidates the ultimate contradiction. The situation appears to be that Njord, who during late pagan times, been marked as a male role compared to the earlier female Njärd. It describes how Njord did not thrive in the environment his wife Skade, for whom skiing and hunting was important parts. They are each other's opposite, of heaven and earth, summer and winter. Skade has now taken

up the attributes simultaneously associated with the late pagan Ull, the archer's bow and the runner's skis.

The Sun wheel and pictures related to a solar cult in the form of chariots, horses and ships, where there is a link to the Sun, is among the most prominent among the motives Bronze Age petroglyphs. In several cases images coincides of people and animals with solar symbols and cult acts. Images depicting processions with solringar occur, for example, in the Stora Berg in Uppland. Similar figures, such as Sun-rings depicted with legs, occur both in Tanum and in Kville in Bohuslän. The Sun god appears occasionally as an invisible god, who does not show directly, but only as a hint (echoes), as steps, ring or wheel. One of the more unusual carvings suggests the Sun god's presence only through his attributes. In Tuna, Bälinge Parish, a rock art exist with eleven spears, each with a length of 1.5 to 6.4 meters. The place is located in Tiundaland in the border area between Ulleråker and Bälinge district, not far from Old Uppsala. The spears could be interpreted, like arrows, like a massive burst. The absence of humans and animals suggest that it is not about war or hunting, but rather a symbol of the Sun's rays. The link to the cult of Ull is strongest in this area and this shows associations with older place names and the spread of this, the cult of the ring.

(Picture showing rock art “burst of spears” at Tuna, Sweden)